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ABSTRACT

This digest estimates that 948,000 U.S. children may both be linguistically different and have disabilities. The nature of instruction and educational placement of these students should be based on the degree of disability, level of language proficiency in both English and the primary language, and intellectual capacity. Placement decisions should consider such factors as level of adaptive behavior, social maturity, ambulation or mobility, amount and type of language input received in the home environment, and success in past and present placements. Operationalizing bilingual special education requires the creation of an instructional social system that involves active teaching of cognitive skills and includes the development of language skills while focusing on the acquisition of English. The digest lists nine basic elements of an individualized education program for exceptional bilingual students, nine steps in developing a comprehensive curriculum, 10 considerations in selecting materials for bilingual exceptional children, and 11 guidelines for adapting instructional materials. (Nine references) (JDD)

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BILINGUAL SPECIAL EDUCATION

Leonard M. Baca and Hermes T. Cervantes

How Many Students Are Both Disabled and Bilingual?

Based on 1980 Census and Immigration and Naturalization Services records, it is estimated that there are 79 million school-age language minority children in the United States. This bilingual population is distributed throughout the United States with heavier concentrations in the southwest and northeast. The highest concentration is in the large urban areas.

Considering the overall population with limited English proficiency (LEP) in the United States, a critical question for bilingual special educators is how many of these students also have disabilities. According to the U.S. Office of Special Education, an estimated 948,000 children may both be linguistically different and have disabilities—a substantial population who could benefit from bilingual special education services.

Although overrepresentation is an issue in some school districts, a new problem of underrepresentation has also emerged in some areas (Ovando & Collier, 1985) because many LEP students with disabilities are being placed in bilingual education as an alternative to special education (Baca & Cervantes, 1989).

How Can Special Education and Bilingual Education Be Combined?

Developers of bilingual special education programs need to weigh three factors for each student: degree of disability; level of language proficiency in both English and the primary language; and intellectual capacity. The student's placement on each of these three continuums will determine the nature of instruction and the educational placement.

Students' degree of disability must be considered for program design, along with their intellectual capacities and their proficiencies in English and their other languages (Baca & Payon, 1989). For example, a student of average intelligence who has a high level of language proficiency in Spanish, a minimal level of ability in English, and limited visual acuity will require curricular services and placement different from those of a student who is linguistically limited in both languages, exhibits lower intellectual performance, and is severely language delayed.

What Variables Should Influence Placement Decisions?

Program placement should be the best fit between the student's needs and the available resources. Placement decisions for the bilingual exceptional student should reflect the type and nature of instruction to be provided, the language of instruction, the conveyor of instruction, the duration of instruction, and the student's learning needs and style. The following special education variables and bilingual factors should be addressed in identifying placements (Baca & Payon, 1989, p. 96):

- Student's age.
- Type and degree of impairment or disability.
- Age at which disability occurred.
- Level of language involvement because of the disability.
- Level of academic achievement.
- Entry level language skills (upon entering school).
- Measured intellectual ability.
- Method and language used in measuring academic achievement and intellectual ability.
- Level of adaptive behavior.
- Time spent in United States.
- Current cultural home setting.
- Social maturity.
- Level of language proficiency in English and other language.
- Amount and type of language input received in the home environment.
- Speech and language capabilities in both languages.
- Presence of multiple handicaps.
- Ambulation or mobility.
- Success in past and present placements.
- Wishes of students and parents.

What Is Needed to Get Started?

Operationalizing bilingual special education requires the creation of an instructional social system that involves active teaching of cognitive skills and includes the development of language skills while focusing on the acquisition of English. All instruction is prescribed in a manner that accommodates and remediates the student's exceptionality. Students must understand the directions and the nature of the tasks. Instruction must be provided within a relevant cultural context so that expectations can be understood by the student. Because language is the primary conveyor of instruction, the student's stronger language must be employed.

Based on the assumption that students learn best in their preferred language, bilingual special education is operationalized at each local level with each individual student in mind. The common thread is to provide for all students educational experiences that develop lifelong learning skills (Baca & Payon, 1989).

What Are the Basic Elements of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for These Children?

IEPs for exceptional bilingual students should include the following elements:

1. The child's current educational status, including all service programs the child is receiving.

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2. Goals, including adaptation to acculturation and growth in both the first and second language. The goals must be realistic in regard to the time necessary; years could be involved.

3. The sequence of short-term instructional objectives leading up to each goal.

4. A list of instructional and service requirements, including a balance between the first and second language, as well as delineation of who will assist with acculturation needs.

5. An indication of how much and what aspects of the program will be in the mainstream.

6. The program's duration.

7. Realistic criteria and a schedule for evaluation of the IEP's effectiveness.

8. A statement of the role of the parents.

9. Specification of changes to be made in the physical, social, and instructional realms, including the first and second languages and cross-cultural adaptation. (Collier, 1989, pp. 272–273)

What Are the Steps In Developing a Comprehensive Curriculum ?

The four major partners in bilingual special education curriculum development are the parents, the mainstream teacher, the bilingual teacher, and the special education teacher. The following steps should be undertaken by this team:

1. Meet as a team to begin the planning process. Outline planning steps.

2. Become familiar with the culture and language background of the child.

3. Become familiar with the special learning style and education needs of the child.

4. Prepare an individual instructional plan with short- and long-term goals (in some cases this may be an IEP).

5. Develop individualized lessons and materials appropriate to the child's exceptionality.

6. Modify individualized lessons and materials using a "cultural screen" and sensitivity.

7. Refer to resource people for assistance and cooperation in instruction; coordinate services.

8. Evaluate the child's ongoing progress and develop a new individual plan (IEP), materials, and so forth, as needed.

9. Start the cycle over. (Collier & Kalk, 1989, p. 207)

What Should Be Considered in Selecting Materials for Bilingual Exceptional Children?

The following guidelines represent some of the many considerations teachers should bear in mind when evaluating, selecting, adapting, or developing materials:

1. Know the specific language abilities of each student.

2. Include appropriate cultural experiences in material adapted or developed.

3. Ensure that material progresses at a rate commensurate with student needs and abilities.

4. Document the success of selected materials.

5. Adapt only specific materials requiring modifications, and do not attempt to change too much at one time.

6. Try out different materials and adaptations until an appropriate education for each student is achieved.

7. Strategically implement materials adaptations to ensure smooth transitions into the new materials.

8. Follow some consistent format or guide when evaluating materials.

9. Be knowledgeable about particular cultures and heritages and their compatibility with selected materials.

10. Follow a well-developed process for evaluating the success of adapted or developed materials as the individual language and cultural needs of students are addressed. (Hoover & Collier, 1989, p. 253)

How Can Materials Be Adapted?

Several guidelines for adapting commercial materials or developing teacher-made materials are discussed in the literature (Harris & Schultz, 1986; Lewis & Doorlag, 1987; Mandell & Gold, 1984). The following list is not designed to be all inclusive; variations may be required in order to meet individual needs.

- Adjust the method of presentation or content.
- Develop supplemental material.
- Tape-record directions for the material.
- Provide alternatives for responding to questions.
- Rewrite brief sections to lower the reading level.
- Outline the material for the student before reading a selection.
- Reduce the number of pages or items on a page to be completed by the student.
- Break tasks into smaller subtasks.
- Provide additional practice to ensure mastery.
- Substitute a similar, less complex task for a particular assignment.
- Develop simple study guides to complement required materials. (Hoover & Collier, 1989, p. 253)

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